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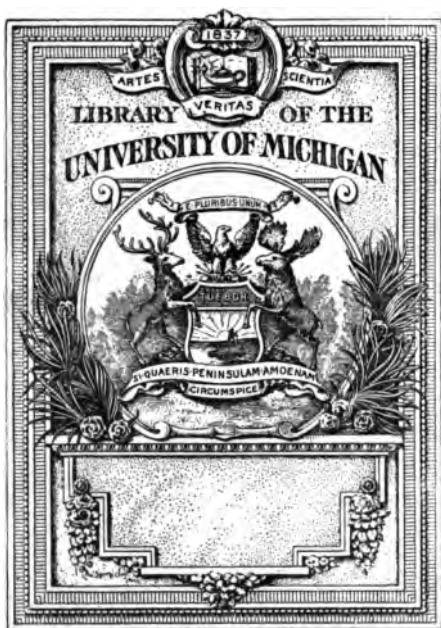
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BACK OF THE YARDS

CHARACTERS

A PRIEST
A POLICE SERGEANT
A BOY
THE BOY'S MOTHER
A GIRL

NOTICE: Application for permission to perform this play in the United States should be made to The Stage Guild, Railway Exchange Building, Chicago; and application for permission to perform it elsewhere should be made to Mr. B. Iden Payne, The Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, England. No performance of it may take place without consent of the owners of the acting rights.

BACK OF THE YARDS

e Scene is the kitchen of a small flat in the district back of the Chicago Stock Yards. It is extremely clean and neat. There is a door at the back into a hallway, and a door at the right into a bedroom.

e Time is about nine-thirty on a warm summer evening, and the two windows at the left are open, letting in a mixture of street-noises.

SGEANT BENNETT, in his shirt-sleeves, sits near one of the windows, smoking a pipe and reading the EVENING AMERICAN. FATHER VINCENT, in the dress of a Roman Catholic priest, sits in one of the straight-backed chairs beside the table in the centre of the room. He is evidently thinking hard about something unpleasant, and from time to time mops his face with a handkerchief which he takes from a clerical hat lying beside him on the table.

THE SERGEANT. *[taking his pipe from his mouth and shaking his head.]* It beats hell! It does beat —

THE PRIEST. Eh? I beg your pardon, Sergeant, I wasn't listening.

THE SERGEANT. Beg yours, your Reverence. My tongue slipped on me.

(5)

THE PRIEST, I didn't catch what you said?

THE SERGEANT. I was saying, it beats all how they come to do it. And them decent kids mostly, with good bringing up, too, and fine hardworking folks back of 'em.

THE PRIEST. More about it in the evening paper?

THE SERGEANT. Column and a half. Listen here to the headlines, will you?

THE PRIEST. No. I don't want to. It makes me feel sick and old.

THE SERGEANT. [*laying down his paper.*] They're calling us dubs. They're after Mc-Weeney to shake things up all over the place. As if it was his fault! Whose fault is it anyhow? I've seen epidemics of crime before. This here ain't the same thing. It's been happening more or less right along. It hops up where you ain't looking for it. It ain't new and it's new all the time. It ain't like placing the blame for regular jobs. It ain't like dealing with regular crooks. You can't put your finger on it. How the devil—excuse me—

THE PRIEST. Yes, how the —?

THE SERGEANT. They got one of this here last bunch anyhow, and they got him good, too. He's at the County Hospital—a kid not more'n nineteen with two chunks of lead in him—un-identified—he ain't opened his head. Not a chance for him. It's all in the—

THE PRIEST. I saw him myself this evening, about an hour ago.

THE SERGEANT. Go on with you, now! You didn't know him by chance?

THE PRIEST. It was Jimmy Reagan.

THE SERGEANT. No Jimmy Reagan?

THE PRIEST. Joe Reagan's boy, [that I gave the holy baptism to with my own hands] Red-headed Jimmy that I danced on my own knee.

THE SERGEANT. It's proud you should be of him and you sticking up for him always. What was I telling you only last week? Wasn't I saying he'd be doing his time yet? Wasn't I now? And a long time at that.

THE PRIEST. He'll be doing longer time than this State could keep him for.

THE SERGEANT. What's that you're saying?

THE PRIEST. He's gone.

THE SERGEANT. Gone? Dead?

THE PRIEST. Without the final consolation; without a word; without a spark of hope to cheer him.

THE SERGEANT. God have mercy!

THE PRIEST. Hush! She's coming back.

THE SERGEANT. [in a tense whisper] What did you get me over here for? You ain't thinking of Michael, surely?

THE PRIEST. Hush, now, and put a quiet face on you, Sergeant. It may be that I'm only an old fool after all. [*Enter MRS. CONNORS, a cheerful woman of thirty-nine or so.*] It's a late hour you're abroad, my dear.

[*The two men rise and THE SERGEANT struggles into his coat.*]

MRS. CONNORS. God save your Reverence! And you, too, Mr. Sergeant. I'd have been back earlier if I'd knowed there was two such old friends waiting for me. Think of it, the clergy and the police both to once.

THE SERGEANT. [*with labored lightness*] Where was you all the time?

MRS. CONNORS. [*taking off her hat*] To the movies with a friend. [*To THE SERGEANT*] Don't cock a jealous eye on me now, Peter. It was with Mrs. Steinbrecker I went, her and her cousin, by way of celebrating the birthday of her first twins, and them dead, poor dears, five years back. [*To THE PRIEST*] Come now, Father, don't look at me like I'd done a black bad thing. You wouldn't grudge a poor widow her squint at the films, would you?

[*She hangs up her hat and shawl.*]

THE PRIEST. God forbid, my dear. They've their educational value, doubtless.

[*THE PRIEST and THE SERGEANT sit down.*]

MRS. CONNORS. That they have. You should have seen 'em tonight—clear as the

image itself. The story of the taking of James. That's the bandit out Kansas they tell me.

E PRIEST. [*hastily*] I know, I know!
[THE SERGEANT coughs.]

S. CONNORS. [*to THE SERGEANT*] What's
; you?

E SERGEANT. Nothing. A dry spot in my
it.

S. CONNORS. You've been sitting in the
ght of the window again. [*Turning to THE*
ST] God save us! You've the look as if
one had laid a cold hand to the back of your

E PRIEST. I was overheated with running
street car, a while since.

S. CONNORS. That black coat of yours is
hot this weather. You should get you an
a thing like Father Weaver wears. Sit
he both of you till I fetch a sup of some-
.

E SERGEANT. Ahem! Thank you kindly.

S. CONNORS. There wasn't anything par-
ar you come to see me about, was there?
[*She goes to the cupboard and takes
out a large pitcher of cold tea
and three glasses.*]

E PRIEST. No, no! We just dropped in
friendly chat with you, Mrs. Connors.

MRS. CONNORS. [*setting the tea and the glasses on the centre table*] Peter's no stranger to be sure. Half the nights of the week when he's off duty at the station, I have him sitting up here with me till I'm yawning my head off for sleep. [*She goes to a small ice-box and opens it.*]

THE SERGEANT. Whist, now! Do you hear that, Father? And there's many would say I was an amusing man, too.

MRS. CONNORS. [*laughing*] There's many would say that you're trying to marry me, Peter Bennett. It's a black scandal else they'll be making about us.

[*She comes back with a small piece of ice in her hand.*]

awful
THE SERGEANT. The brass of her! Ain't the women ~~hell~~ these days with their notions of decency? She'll be asking me to marry her next.

MRS. CONNORS. [*dropping the ice into the pitcher of tea*] I will not.

THE SERGEANT. Then, I'll ask you again myself for the fifth time.

MRS. CONNORS. Have you no shame—before Father Vincent?

[*She goes to the cupboard and takes out a white china sugar-bowl and three spoons.*]

THE SERGEANT. Hear her, now!

THE PRIEST. You might do worse, Mrs. Connors.

MRS. CONNORS. [*coming back with the sugar and spoons*] Go on! What would I want with a husband? I can take care of myself, can't I? What with the money I got in the Savings Bank and what I can make off the shop—and Margaret earning her fifteen a week steady as clockwork—and Michael coming to be a fine man, too.

THE PRIEST. Aye, and have you got Michael a position yet, Mrs. Connors?

MRS. CONNORS. Almost!
[*She pours the cold tea.*]

THE PRIEST. I've had it on my mind that he should have more steady employment. He should be making his own way by now.

MRS. CONNORS. Let the lad find his groove. It's no pinch for us to be giving him a bit of help yet awhile.

[*She adds a generous supply of sugar.*]

THE PRIEST. It's the danger of idle time on a young man's hands that I'm thinking about.

THE SERGEANT. [*taking his glass of tea and stirring it carefully*] What with crap games, and such like, and the dancing they do these days in some of the halls, and the bunch of loafers hanging around the pool parlors, a

saint out of heaven couldn't keep straight without he had steady work, Mrs. Connors. That's what his Reverence means to say.

MRS. CONNORS. [*passing a glass of tea to THE PRIEST*] Let be, I'm not worrying my head over Michael. He's a good boy, Michael is.

THE SERGEANT. Aye, he should be a good boy right enough.

[THE PRIEST. You've been an indulgent mother to him]

MRS. CONNORS. Was it Michael you came to talk about after all? [*To THE SERGEANT*] What are you both fidgeting at? I might have knowed there was something special for you to bring Father Vincent with you.

THE PRIEST. The Sergeant didn't bring me, I assure you.

THE SERGEANT. [*stalling for time*] Make your mind easy. It was this way. I was coming up here myself when I met his Reverence in the street below. "Come along," I says, "and have a talk with Mrs. Connors," I says. "Her flat's the coolest place I know outside of a beer-garden." It was nothing else at all.

MRS. CONNORS. [*setting down her own tea untasted*] Tell me it right out. Has Michael been hurt? Are you trying to break the news to me?

THE PRIEST. No, no, no! Don't alarm yourself.

THE SERGEANT. I give you my word on it.

MRS. CONNORS. He ain't got himself in any trouble? That ain't what you're trying to tell me?

THE PRIEST. My dear woman, I know no more about Michael than you do!

THE SERGEANT. You couldn't tell us when he's like to be home, could you?

MRS. CONNORS. Then it is him you want to see?

THE SERGEANT. [*looking at THE PRIEST and beginning to flounder*] Well, in a manner of speaking.

MRS. CONNORS. What about?

THE PRIEST. [*coming to THE SERGEANT'S aid*] I tell you don't alarm yourself. 'Tis only a bit of business we have with him; nothing important. It can wait.

THE SERGEANT. Sure it can. We only thought if he came in while we was here we might fix it up with him.

MRS. CONNORS. [*to THE SERGEANT*] What was it?

THE SERGEANT. [*at a loss*] Well, his Reverence was saying—

THE PRIEST. I was saying to Sergeant Bennett that there's to be a grand picnic of the Parish schools, Mrs. Connors. Sometime next month it's to be, and I thought if Michael would help me take charge of the boy's sports—

THE SERGEANT. He's a great hand with the kids.

MRS. CONNORS. And it was about asking Michael to take care of the boys' sports at a church picnic that you've been pulling long faces for a full half hour, was it?

THE PRIEST. 'Tis the heat, and other things beside Michael and the picnic made me pull a long face.

THE SERGEANT. Couldn't you tell me, will he be home tonight do you think, Mrs. Connors?

MRS. CONNORS. Michael's gone to Gary—where a job was offered him. He's been gone about two days now. Tuesday morning he went, and he's not sent me word. It's likely enough he'll be back tonight if the job don't suit him, or to fetch him his clothes mebbe, it's what he wants.

THE SERGEANT. Ah, well, it's early yet. One way or another he might be minded to come.

THE PRIEST. We'll sit and chat awhile longer on the chance he does.

MRS. CONNORS. You can sit awhile and wait, come, I'm sure, though you did give me a bad

ist now. What with the accidents we're
g of every day and the mischief some
s forever getting into.

SERGEANT. Michael do have the way
ing his own advice mostly.

[There is a knock at the door.]

GIRL *[outside.]* Mrs. Connors, oh, Mrs.
rs! Are you there?

. CONNORS. *[rising hastily]* There, now,
can she want?

*[She goes quickly to the door and opens
it. THE GIRL, about seventeen,
cheaply but somewhat flashily
dressed, enters, visibly excited.]*

GIRL. Thanks! *[She looks around as if
hat dazed.]*

. CONNORS. What ^{*could be the matter*} ails the girl? Ain't
ing to give Father Vincent good evening?

GIRL. *[scarcely noticing THE PRIEST]*
evening, Father] Oh, Mrs. Connors, you
come with me to Mrs. Reagan's. You
come quick—right away. They can't
thing with her. *[THE SERGEANT and THE
rise.]*

SERGEANT. They've told her then!

PRIEST. Hush, man, can't you?

*[Neither MRS. CONNORS nor THE GIRL
notice THE PRIEST and THE SER-
GEANT.]*

What could be the matter?

MRS. CONNORS. ^ What's happened at the Reagan's?

THE GIRL. It's Jimmy! He's been killed! They've just broke it to her.

MRS. CONNORS. Killed? Jimmy Reagan killed? Oh, God have mercy! How was he killed?

THE PRIEST. [trying to stop THE GIRL's story] Hadn't you better go with her, Mrs. Connors. They'll tell you when you—

MRS. CONNORS. How was he killed?

THE GIRL. Ain't you seen the papers? They shot him last night. There was a hold-up somewhere over on the boulevards. The guy they tried to stick put up a fight.

MRS. CONNORS. What's this got to do with respectable people like the Reegans?

THE GIRL. I tell you it's Jimmy Reagan that's shot. He was took to the hospital. He couldn't give no name. Nobody knew who he was till Father Vincent and Father Weaver seen him there this evening. He was unconscious. He couldn't say nothing. He died at half-past eight.

MRS. CONNORS. [turning on THE PRIEST] Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me and me having knowed Molly Reagan since we was girls? What do you mean by sitting there like an image and saying nothing at all?

THE PRIEST. My heart was that heavy I had to take my own time, Mrs. Connors. I'm getting to be an old man.

MRS. CONNORS. You and your way! And your heart! And Molly Reegan crying her eyes out for her boy!

THE SERGEANT. Aye, we was getting around to tell you.

THE GIRL. Ain't you coming, Mrs. Connors? Ain't you coming along?

MRS. CONNORS. I'm coming this minute and Father Vincent with me.

THE PRIEST. No, no, Mrs. Connors! Father Weaver's there already and Joe Reegan himself. That's men enough in one house of sorrow. It's women they want now. By your leave, I'll stay here with the Sergeant for awhile.

MRS. CONNORS. [*putting a shawl over her head*] You should come with me I'm thinking.

THE SERGEANT. There now, my dear, his Reverence knows best.

THE PRIEST. You can send for me if need be.

MRS. CONNORS. Have it your own way.]
[*She goes out and is heard clattering down the stairs. THE GIRL is about to follow her when THE PRIEST stops her.*]

THE PRIEST. Wait a minute, my lass.

THE GIRL. Well, what you stopping me for? I got to go back with her.

THE PRIEST. I want to ask you if you've seen Michael this evening?

THE GIRL. [*with a quick look at THE PRIEST*] No, I ain't seen him.

THE PRIEST. Ah, I thought you might have. Or today, perhaps?

THE GIRL. How would I see him and me working at the cannery?

THE PRIEST. I only thought that you and he and Jimmy Reegan were great friends.

THE GIRL. I was no friend of Jimmy Reegan's. Michael wasn't thick with him either. I told him to keep clear of him—honest to God, I did.

THE PRIEST. You showed good sense.

THE GIRL. Is that all you want with me?

THE PRIEST. If you chance to see Michael, tell him I want to talk with him. That's all. Tell him I'll be here for an hour waiting to see him.

THE GIRL. [*jerking her head toward THE SERGEANT*] What's he doing here?

THE PRIEST. He's Michael's friend. Take my word, we know what's best for him. He'll come to no harm through us.

THE GIRL. [*sullenly*] I ain't going to steer Michael into no pinch. I tell you he ain't done nothing. I don't know where he is at that.

THE PRIEST. Listen to me now, my girl. I've a strong notion you'll be seeing Michael for all you say. And if it's in your head to be warning him against coming home here, it's his living soul you'll put in jeopardy, as sure as you stand there hearing me. Keep your hands off God's work this night and you'll come to thank the old man that asked it.

[THE GIRL goes out. THE PRIEST closes the door and comes back to his chair beside the table.]

THE SERGEANT. He'll not come to us now with that young fly-by-night waiting at the corner to give him the tip.

THE PRIEST. No. I've faith in the girl, and in Michael, too, for the matter of that. I'd not be waiting here else.

THE SERGEANT. [*coming over and leaning on the table*] Can't you speak out, your Reverence? You've got in your mind that Michael was mixed up in last night's job?

THE PRIEST. I'm hardly ready to say that.

THE SERGEANT. But you heard his mother saying he's been in Gary since Tuesday morning.

THE PRIEST. I saw him last evening.

THE SERGEANT. The devil you did! And where was he?

THE PRIEST. In front of Swarz's Pool Parlor, talking with Jimmy Reagan.

THE SERGEANT. [*eagerly*] Couldn't he meet with Jimmy Reagan by chance and pass the time of day with him? That don't prove nothing, does it?

THE PRIEST. It may be that I am only an old fool after all, as I said to you before, but I'll not be at ease till we've seen Michael tonight.

THE SERGEANT. I'll bet my stripes on it, the boy's done nothing crooked. But if it's a scare you want thrown into him, I'm your man, and it's a grand time to do it, too.

THE PRIEST. It's a pity that it always takes an awful thing like what has just happened to show us the real need.

THE SERGEANT. The real need of what?

THE PRIEST. A change in our way of looking at things—our educational systems, our way of dealing with the boys in the street, our police.

THE SERGEANT. What's the matter with the police?

THE PRIEST. It's not for an old man like me to say, but I've thought for a long time that there was something lacking. You don't seem to understand rightly what's best for the boys in the street.

THE SERGEANT. We don't, eh? See here, now! Ninety per cent. of the force was once just what you're calling the boys in the street. Wasn't I one myself? Don't we know the poor people and their kids like none of your long-haired, down-state reformers can ever get to know them?

THE PRIEST. You know them too well. Too many of your patrolmen are stationed in their own home districts. They have too many friends. Sentiment gets into it too often. They're too easy on the small beginnings of mischief that go to make the big ends of crime.

THE SERGEANT. Are you calling me a man that would let sentiment interfere with my duty?

THE PRIEST. I remember once when they complained to you that the boys were breaking windows in Eisenthorp's vacant factory building on 46th Street, and Jimmy Reegan and Michael Connors were among the lot; I remember what the Lieutenant said when the Anti-Cruelty people got after him about the way the kids were treating the stray cats and dogs in the precinct.

THE SERGEANT. Them's little things to be raking up against the force surely, at a time like this.

THE PRIEST. You've known for a long time that half the pool parlors were running crap

tables and three-quarters of the saloons selling liquor to boys under age, to say nothing of some that sell it to girls.

THE SERGEANT. You can't expect a bar-keep to spot a lad's age every time, can you? Would you have us playing nurse-girl to all the kids of the world? Would you have us pinching our friends for the little small things like you're talking about, when half the time you couldn't prove it on 'em in court if you got 'em there? Where would *we* get off? I know there's laws to cover what you've said, but it's up to the Department what laws are important to be pushed.

THE PRIEST. What are laws for if they're not to be enforced?

THE SERGEANT. Ask them that made them. Ask the Administration. Don't ask me. I take my orders and do the best I know how. I'm straight, too. I've never took a cent of dirty money in my life, so help me God. And that's something to say if I do say it myself.

THE PRIEST. It is a great deal to say and its true I'm sure, Sergeant Bennett, I've great respect for you as a man. But it's not graft or politics I'm thinking of. There's something does more to send boys and girls to hell than either of them. It's the rule-of-thumb way we go at crime for the most part, making a great pother of catching and punishing the old hands at the game and letting slip the little things,

slurring them over, hushing them up, passing by all the sprees and gambling and devilment that give the crook his start.

THE SERGEANT. You're a fine one to be talking; you with the name of being the softest-hearted, easiest-going man in the parish, begging your pardon.

THE PRIEST. It's come to me all at once that we're both greatly to blame, Sergeant, each in his way. I mean to make a new start—with Michael, tonight, God willing it.

THE SERGEANT. I say again, I'll bet my stripes Michael had nothing to do with it, but if he had now? Supposing he had? Have you it in your mind to help him, Father?

THE PRIEST. I have, indeed.

THE SERGEANT. 'Twould put me in a sore place.

THE PRIEST. You'll do your own duty and what's right by Michael.

THE SERGEANT. 'Twould seem a hard thing to make them both go together.

THE PRIEST. Hush! What's that?

THE SERGEANT. [*in a whisper*] I didn't hear nothing. [*They both listen expectantly. There is a slight shuffling outside. The door opens and THE BOY enters. He is about eighteen or nineteen,*

*rather too well dressed. He looks
very drawn and tired, and
one arm hang limply at his side.
He seems a little startled at seeing
THE PRIEST and THE SERGEANT.*

THE PRIEST. Well, Michael?

THE BOY. Good evening, Father Vince.
Evening, Sergeant.

THE SERGEANT. Back from Gary, eh?

THE BOY. Yes.

THE SERGEANT. Job didn't suit you or y
didn't suit the job?

THE BOY. Nothing doing!

THE PRIEST. Good jobs aren't so easy
find.

THE BOY. No. Where's my mother?

THE PRIEST. She's stepped out for a lit
while.

THE SERGEANT. She's over at Mrs. Reegar.

THE BOY. [*sitting down*] Of course, I mig
have known that.

THE SERGEANT. Then you know wha
happened?

THE BOY. Yes. It was all in the papers.
seen one of the fellers, too, that heard all abo
it.



THE PRIEST. It was a terrible thing, Mickey.

THE BOY. Fierce! Can you tell me, is Jimmy as bad hurt as the papers say?

THE SERGEANT. You ain't heard, then?

THE BOY. [*looking up*] Heard what?

THE PRIEST. He's dead.

THE BOY. Dead? Jimmy Reegan dead?

THE SERGEANT. That's why your mother's gone over to the Reegan's.

[*They are all silent for a moment.*]

THE BOY. [*pulling himself together*] When did she say she'd be back? I've got to see her before eleven o'clock.

THE PRIEST. Listen to me, Michael. When Sergeant Bennett and I heard about Jimmy Reegan, we just thought we'd come over and have a talk with you.

THE BOY. [*nervously*] I don't know nothing about Jimmy.

THE SERGEANT. It wasn't exactly about Jimmy, either. His Reverence was saying—

THE PRIEST. That it seemed like a good opportunity to point out one or two things to you, my lad.

THE BOY. [*sullenly*] I haven't got time to sit here and listen to preaching. I've got to see my mother before—

THE SERGEANT. What are you in such a
rush to see your mother for?

THE BOY. What business is that of yours?

THE PRIEST. Easy, now!

THE BOY. I'm going away from Chicago, and
you've got to know. I met a feller that was
here from Denver, looking for men. They're
short of hands in all the building trades out
there. I can get a better start and better pay
only I've got to go out with him on the eleven
o'clock train tonight.

THE SERGEANT. [*rubbing his chin with his
hand*] Oh, ho! So you're going away, are you?
Out to Denver.

THE PRIEST. Denver's a long way.

THE BOY. They don't give a feller no chance
here.

THE SERGEANT. Maybe you're right. I'm
not saying you ain't.

THE PRIEST. Your mother'll take it hard,
your going so far away where she can't tell how
you're getting on all the time.

THE BOY. I can't help that. She'll have no
call to worry about me.

THE SERGEANT. [*with the air of hoping to get
away from an unpleasant duty*] Mebbe you'd
like a little word with Father Vincent alone,
if you're going so soon?

[*He gets up.*]

THE BOY. I don't know what about.

THE SERGEANT. [*buttoning his coat*] I'll just step around to Reegan's. If your mother ain't needed, I'll send her back to you.

THE BOY. Thanks.

THE SERGEANT. [*taking up his cap*] Good-bye, Mickey.

THE BOY. [*without looking up*] Good-bye.

THE SERGEANT. [*holding out his hand*] Good luck to you—in Denver.

[*THE BOY gets up, winces a little as if it hurt him to move and holds out his hand.*]

THE BOY. Thanks.

THE SERGEANT. Goodnight to you, Father Vincent. [*He goes out. THE PRIEST mops his face again with his handkerchief and seems at a loss for what to say next. THE BOY listens as if to make sure THE SERGEANT has gone down the stairs, hesitates, and then seems to make up his mind.*]

THE BOY. Father Vincent, do you know anything about medicine?

THE PRIEST. Eh? What's that?

THE BOY. Do you know anything about fixing hurts; I mean fixing them temporary like, bandaging and such, so the dirt won't get into them?

THE PRIEST. A little, yes, I can do that much. But who's been hurt?

THE BOY. [*rather desperately*] Me. It's nothing. I mean it ain't much.

THE PRIEST. How?

THE BOY. It was this afternoon. One of the fellers out at Gary had a gun. We were fooling with it and it went off.

THE PRIEST. [*drawing his chair toward the boy and watching his face closely*] Where did it hit you?

THE BOY. In the arm.

THE PRIEST. Why didn't they take you to a doctor?

THE BOY. [*sullenly*] We was afraid we'd get pinched for having the gun. I tore a piece off my shirt. It didn't bleed hardly at all. I said I'd see a doctor when I got in town.

THE PRIEST. But you haven't.

THE BOY. I met the man from Denver that I was telling you about. I wasn't thinking much about it.

THE PRIEST. Your mother will be back shortly. She'd better have a look at it, too.

BOY. [*taking off his coat with evident haste*] I'd sooner she didn't know. She'd be
3 me from doing what I want.

[THE PRIEST *helps* THE BOY *with the coat, swiftly unwinds the clumsy bandage from his arm and glances at the wound.*]

BOY. Well?

PRIEST. It's worse than you told me,
31.

BOY. [*almost fiercely*] No it ain't!

PRIEST. [*putting his hand on THE BOY'S shoulder*] I'm afraid it is beginning to fester already
u've got a fever, my lad.

BOY. I tell you it don't hurt much and I
ot a fever.

PRIEST. Hadn't you better go with me
ctor?

BOY. There ain't time. I've got to
the eleven o'clock train. It's after ten
Can't you help me wash it and put on a
indage before mother gets back?

PRIEST. [*standing squarely in front of
32 and folding his hands behind his back*]
re never in Gary at all, Michael Connors.

BOY. [*drawing back*] Who's told you
3?

THE PRIEST. Nobody. I saw you myself last night.

THE BOY. [*frightened*] When did you see me?

THE PRIEST. Sometime early in the evening. I don't rightly know just what the hour was, about eight o'clock I think, and you were with Jimmy Reegan.

[*He takes a bowl from the shelf and fills it with warm water from the kettle on the stove.*]

THE BOY. What if I was? I don't have to account to you for where I was all the time, do I? Or who I talked to, either?

THE PRIEST. No, I suppose not. But it would be better if you could.

[*He takes two clean dish-towels from the rack and places the bowl on the table.*]

THE BOY. I tell you I only seen Jimmy for a minute. I don't know where he went afterwards or what he done. I only know what I read in the papers and what's been told me.

THE PRIEST. Aye, but I'm afraid you do know more Michael. I'm sorely afraid you do.

[*He bathes THE BOY'S arm with warm water from the bowl and binds it up with one of the dish-towels.*]

THE BOY. What's the good of my talking if you ain't going to believe me?

PRIEST. Tell me the truth, lad, and I'll
you fast enough.

BOY. What makes you think I ain't
you the truth?

PRIEST. You gave yourself away, Mi-
che minute you came in at that door.

BOY. How?

PRIEST. By knowing it was Jimmy
I had been shot and not knowing he was
His name wasn't in the papers at all.
I knew it was Jimmy till Father Weaver
the news to his family. There, now,
you see it's no use lying to me? How
you have known it was Jimmy?

BOY. [*lying desperately and sullenly*] I
with him. I had it from one of the
I swear I did. I ain't done nothing.
You take my word for it?

PRIEST. I'd be a happy man this night
old.

BOY. What do you want me to say?

PRIEST. [*taking a little cross from his own
and holding it out to THE BOY*] Can you
o me on this, Michael?

[THE BOY takes the cross and holds
it in his hand with his head bowed
over it, staring at it as if fasci-
nated.]

THE BOY. [*without looking up*] You'd ought to take my word.

THE PRIEST. If you've done nothing, 'twould do you no hurt to swear by the cross, lad, and you'll ease a poor heart that wishes you were Mickey.

THE BOY. I—I—

[*He looks up suddenly, his face twitching, and reaches for the PRIEST'S hand.*]

Oh, Father Vincent, you'll not split on me. You've had it out of me like I don't know what it was. You've dragged it out of me like you had it with pincers in your hand. I'm sick or you wouldn't have got it from me so easy.

THE PRIEST. [*soothingly*] There, there! Go on. Tell it all to me and we'll see what can be done.

THE BOY. [*stumbling along incoherently*] I never did nothing like this before. I've run with a bad bunch, I know that, but they know I was straight—leastways straighter than they was. They never tried to pull me in on any crooked stuff, honest to God they didn't. Jimmy was white to me, too. There was five of us together yesterday. We got too many drinks. I don't know how many. Then somebody said: "Let's go to a show," but we didn't have no more money. Then, somebody else said: "Let's go out and get some easy coin."

the boulevards." It was all sort of foggy from that on. We went somewheres and got four guns they had hidden in a barn. Then one of them that wasn't very drunk went and sneaked a car out of a garage and picked us up around the corner. I don't remember where we drove to, till we came along side of a guy on the sidewalk. I didn't think what they was going to do, honest to God I didn't. Me and Jimmy and the other feller in the tonneau jumped out, Jimmy runs up to the guy on the sidewalk and shoves a gun in his face. It wasn't even loaded. None of them was except the one I had and I never took that out of my pocket. Before we could say nothing, the guy pulls a gun himself and lets Jimmy have it twice. Somebody yells "Cops" and we runs for the machine. I knew they was plugging at us but we didn't plug back. Just as I got my foot on the step something hit me in the arm. I didn't think of Jimmy till we'd got clear away. We couldn't go back for him. The feller that was driving the car had nerve all right. He took us out to a place in Englewood and ran the car back to the garage. It wasn't out more'n an hour. Nobody spotted that he had it out. That's all that happened.

THE PRIEST. I won't ask you who the other boys were.

THE BOY. [*miserably*] I wouldn't tell you that. Nobody'll get 'em. They're safe by now. I wouldn't have said nothing to you

either, only walking made my arm come on to pain something fierce. I wish to God I hadn't opened my head.

THE PRIEST. You shouldn't wish that.

[THE PRIEST *has finished with the bandage and THE BOY has managed to get back into his coat.*]

THE BOY. I do.

THE PRIEST. Why did you come here?

THE BOY. To see my mother. I sort of had to see her and say good-bye before I went. I had to get a little money from her.

THE PRIEST. Then you are thinking of going away?

THE BOY. [*pointing to his shoulder*] I got to go somewhere. I can't hide this thing around here.

THE PRIEST. You'll go with me now to a doctor and then around to the station and give yourself up..

THE BOY. [*startled*] What are you talking about? What kind of a boob do you take me for?

THE PRIEST. It's the only way you can make things square.

THE BOY. [*defiantly*] I ain't asking to make things square. I didn't do nothing. They

ain't got nothing on me, if you let me alone.

[He gets up and makes a move toward the door.]

THE PRIEST. *[stepping between him and the door]* You'll stop to see your mother. You'll have a word with her.

THE BOY. No, I've changed my mind about seeing her. I'll trouble you to let me by, Father.

THE PRIEST. *[holding his place]* It's only a short way you'd go, Michael.

THE BOY. What do you mean by that? You wouldn't put them on to me? You daren't do it. You wouldn't play me a low trick like that. You had it from me like it was in Confession.

THE PRIEST. Oh, God, why do you tie my hands? *[He steps away from the door.]*

THE BOY. *[with an attempt to smile]* I'd wish you good-bye, Father Vincent, and thank you kindly for the bandage.

[He holds out his hand to THE PRIEST.]

THE PRIEST. *[taking THE BOY'S hand]* God go with you, Michael.

[THE BOY turns to the door, opens it and comes face to face with THE SERGEANT who stands on the threshold, his hands on his hips.]

THE SERGEANT. Well?

THE BOY. [*drawing back startled, but still trying to face it out, not quite sure that THE SERGEANT has overheard*] Oh, it's you, is it? Did you fetch mother back with you?

THE SERGEANT. I did not. I ain't been off the landing. I ain't had my ear away from this door.

THE BOY. [*turning on THE PRIEST*] Then it was a dirty trap you set for me after all—you with your fine snivelling talk about being my friend. You're a fine priest! You got it out of me like it was in holy confessional and him listening at the door all the time, with you knowing it. It was a game, a dirty low game you put on to me!

THE SERGEANT. Shut your mouth, you young ruffian!

THE PRIEST. Easy, now, Sergeant! He doesn't know what he's saying.

THE BOY. You're a pair of spying Judases, the both of you.

THE PRIEST. Listen to me now, Michael.

THE BOY. I will not.

THE SERGEANT. You'd do well to keep a civil tongue and listen to Father Vincent.

THE BOY. [*sneering*] What more has he got to say to me?

THE PRIEST. You'll go with Sergeant Bennett and me to the station, Mickey, and give yourself up. We'll stand by you. It's the only thing to be done.

THE BOY. A fine lot of standing by me you'll do.

THE SERGEANT. Come with me now.

THE BOY. [*desperately*] Get out of that door, you big boob.

[*He reaches to his pocket and draws a gun.*]

THE SERGEANT. [*making a lunge for him*] You would, would you?

THE PRIEST. [*springing between them*] For the love of heaven, have a care, both of you!

THE BOY. [*covering THE SERGEANT with the gun and almost shrieking*] Don't you come near me! Don't you put your hands on me!

THE SERGEANT [*losing his temper*] You young devil, you'd not have got the drop on me like that if I'd of had my gun with me.

THE PRIEST. Steady, Sergeant! 'Twill do you no good to talk to him like that. [*To THE BOY*] Give me the gun.

THE BOY. I will like hell!

THE SERGEANT. [*regaining his coolness*] Give the gun to Father Vincent, you fool! Would you only make things worse for yourself?

THE BOY. Get out of my road. What call have you got to pinch me? They'd have nothing on me only for you two. I'll get out of town and stay out. Let me off, can't you? Who's to know that you done it? Let me off!

THE SERGEANT. [*in doubt*] Isn't he mebbe beginning to talk sense now, your Reverence?

THE BOY. [*seeing a ray of hope*] Let me off I say, and you'll never regret it! Honest to God you won't!

THE SERGEANT. [*beginning to weaken*] It would be a hard thing for me to know I'd had a hand in sending the lad up to the pen, your Reverence. And it's only a small thing he's done after all, and little harm intended.

THE PRIEST. Shame on you, Sergeant Bennett, for saying that.

THE SERGEANT. Mebbe we can look at things different and both of us be right. I wouldn't be hard on him. 'Tis the first time by his own account.

THE PRIEST. 'Tis not what he's done already, but what he'll do yet if we let him go his own road with one crime hanging around his neck, that I'm thinking about. There's no two ways of looking at it.

THE BOY. [*to THE SERGEANT*] Don't you listen to what he's saying. You always was more a friend to me than he was.

THE SERGEANT [*shaking his head*] If he only hadn't pulled a gun on me!

THE BOY. Where would you get off with my mother? You couldn't pinch me! Not on her account, you couldn't! You'd have a swell chance with her after that.

THE SERGEANT. [*his pride hit*] Let be! You'll put down that gun now and come along to the station. [*He makes a move toward THE BOY.*]

THE BOY. [*drawing back*] Stand off, you big tiff, or you'll get yours. I give you fair warning.

THE PRIEST. Would you only make things ten times worse than they are for us?

THE BOY. [*half sobbing*] I don't give a damn. He'll get out of my road. He'll leave me go or I'll give him a dose of what they gave Jimmy. He ain't going to stop me, nor you either.

THE PRIEST. We'd not be your friends if we didn't try.

THE SERGEANT. [*folding his arms*] By God! Father Vincent's right. How far would you get before I put in a call? Not far, I'm thinking, with that arm. They'd get you in an hour at most. Like as not you'd be fool enough to put up a fight, too, and get plugged. They'd be none too careful with you, not them.

THE BOY. Damn you, you've no call to put them on to me.

THE SERGEANT. Supposing I didn't, what good would that do you? You ain't the one to take a lesson from what's happened. I'd only be turning you loose to make a real crook of yourself.

THE BOY. There's worse things in the work than crooks. There's lying priests and dirty scum like you, and—

THE SERGEANT. I tell you once more, put down that gun.

THE BOY. I'll blow your head off if you touch me.

[THE SERGEANT and THE BOY stand facing each other, each waiting for the other to make a move.]

THE PRIEST. Murder's a far worse thing than being only an accomplice in a poor attempt at highway robbery, Mickey. Have you thought of that? No, I don't think you've had the time. You're seeing things wrong tonight. Put away the fear of disgrace now, and the thought of prison. The one will pass when you put your hands to clean work, and the other will be short. It'll go by like a bad dream and you'll come out of it whole, with God's help. It's where you're standing now that I'd have you see clearly before you put out your feet onto the black road of death. There's a pit at your toes, lad, a thirsty pit that sucks men down under the red bowels of the world. You'll no

come back out of it with murder on your soul, nor look at the stars again nor hear your mother's voice speaking to you; not when the seas have gone dry even, or the heavens shrivelled up like a bit of dry parchment.

THE BOY. There ain't no hell. You can't frighten me like that.

THE PRIEST. [*patiently*] Have it your own way. But did you ever think what sort of a life a murderer has to drag on with even if he's let to live? Not weeks and months of wishing he was out in free streets like other men with his friends to give him good-morning and good-evening, but years, and tens of years of wishing and wishing.

THE BOY. What are you giving me? I ain't going to murder anybody. I ain't going to hurt him if he lets me be. Leave off clacking at me.

THE PRIEST. Go with Sergeant Bennett, Michael. They'll not be hard on you for the first offense. 'Tis only just penance you'll be doing and, when you're through, I give you my solemn oath I'll see that you get an honest start in the world.

THE SERGEANT. [*to THE BOY*] You've heard his Reverence talking sense to you. Come along with me quiet-like and it will only be a year you'll get at most, with us to give you a good character, or six months in the Bridewell mebbe, with parole for part of it.

THE BOY. I'm not taking any chances on what they'll give me.

THE SERGEANT. [*starting for THE BOY earnestly*] Come on, you fool, before I break every bone in your body.

THE BOY. [*kicking a chair between them*] Get away from me! Get away, I tell you!

THE SERGEANT. Would you now?

[THE BOY *dodges around the table*
THE SERGEANT *follows and*
grapples with him. THE BOY
wrenches his right arm free and
presses the revolver to THE SER-
GEANT'S body.]

THE BOY. [*screaming with hysteria*] Leave go! Leave go, damn you! Leave go!

THE SERGEANT [*grunting with his exertion*]
Cut it out! Drop it!

THE BOY. [*screaming still louder*] Let go! Let go or I'll kill you! So help me, I will!

[THE PRIEST *is trying to drag THE*
SERGEANT away. He only suc-
ceeds in hampering him and add-
ing to his danger.]

SERGEANT. [*now thoroughly angry and shaking off THE PRIEST*] Ah, ha! my beauty! I get you now!

THE BOY. I give you three. I give you three to stand away from me.

THE PRIEST. *[wringing his hands]* Oh, Mary, have mercy!

THE BOY. *[struggling, with his revolver still pressed to THE SERGEANT'S side]* Don't make me do it! One!

[They stand almost still, gasping for breath.]

THE SERGEANT. *[snarling]* Drop it!

THE BOY. Damn you, then, two!

THE SERGEANT. *[their faces are not more than a couple of inches apart]* Drop it, I say.

THE BOY. Three!

[They are absolutely motionless for a moment. Then the gun falls to the floor with a clatter. THE BOY relaxes in THE SERGEANT'S arms, sobbing.]

THE BOY. I couldn't! I couldn't! My nerve's gone!

THE PRIEST. No, Michael, my dear, it's only just come back to you.

[He takes THE BOY by the shoulder and helps him to the chair by the table. THE BOY buries his face in his arms.]

THE BOY. [sobbing] I'm a coward! I'm a coward! I couldn't do it! I couldn't! I'm a coward! [THE PRIEST pats THE BOY's shoulder.

THE SERGEANT stands beside them, panting like a bull.]

THE PRIEST. No, no, my lad, my little Mickey, be easy now!

[There is a clatter on the stairs.]

THE BOY. I couldn't! I couldn't! I couldn't!

[MRS. CONNORS enters and looks around, frightened.]

MRS. CONNORS. For the love of God, what's happened now? Tell me, what are you doing to the boy? Can't you speak, none of you, and tell me what's happened?

THE PRIEST. Nothing that will do you any hurt in the end, Mrs. Connors. The worst is over now, God be praised. 'Twill all come right in a short while. You've no great call to worry yourself. Take my word.

CURTAIN

